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UKRAINE

SUCCESS STORY

No More Slow Tourist Seasons

Strategic move to conference tourism transforms business



Photo: Southern Tour

Larissa Kazachenko with her husband, right, and Maxi Gainza, a member of the elite British Air Squadron Club, at a vintage planes exhibition at the 150th anniversary of the Crimean War commemoration in 2005.

“Tourism is the industry of hospitality. You should love people you invite to visit your country. It is not only your company’s success at stake — its the country’s whole image is,” said Larissa Kazachenko, a tourism operator who is working to make Crimea a prime destination.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Larissa Kazachenko is a successful businesswoman with 15 years of experience. Her tourism agency, Southern Tour, is known for cultural and historic tourism and exclusive charters. It is one of Crimea’s most successful agencies. In summer, her business boomed, but in winter, tourism ground to a halt.

Tourism has been vital to the Crimean economy for over a century. During Soviet times, Crimean hotels were often at full occupancy despite neglected infrastructure, poor service, and high prices; Crimea was one of the few options for a “sun and sea” vacation. But after the Soviet Union’s fall, Ukrainians began exploring countries such as Turkey, Egypt, and Spain, where they saw better service, reasonable prices, and more vacation activities. To compete in this new world, Crimea’s tourism industry had to improve services, develop infrastructure, diversify offerings, and attract investment. To be profitable, it also needed to attract people during the low season between October and April.

To help Crimean tour operators identify new products and increase their visibility in a competitive global market, USAID experts assisted tour operators in attracting the international conferences market to Crimea. They helped tour operators develop marketing plans and promotional campaigns and helped them attend the International Tourism Exchange ITB Berlin 2005, where Larissa and others learned about conference tourism, found new partners, and convinced organizers of international conferences to hold their events in Ukraine.

The conference market transformed Larissa’s business. With USAID’s assistance, she has forgotten what a “slow season” means. “We are now busy even as the winter gets closer. I have hired extra staff and we have increased our profits. Conference tourism has in fact become a solution for us,” she said.

Last year, Southern Tour increased its annual sales by 160 percent thanks to new contracts with foreign tour operators from the fair. Now, Larissa actively negotiates with new foreign partners each month. As USAID helps Crimea’s tourism sector form new partnerships, increase sales, and promote the Crimean brand, the industry will become more competitive, bringing more tourists — and business — to Crimea.